
I N T R O D U C T I O N



Introduction

In the wake of the successful revitalization of the East Cambridge Riverfront, a new set of issues has recently emerged in East Cambridge. For many residents, the key to protecting and enhancing the quality of life in East Cambridge involves: improving city government's responsiveness to neighborhood concerns; limiting future commercial development; vigorously managing development impacts, such as increased traffic congestion and greater competition for scarce parking; and ensuring that future private and public investment leads to more affordable housing for low and moderate income residents.

The *East Cambridge Riverfront Plan*, which was written ten years ago, led to many important accomplishments: creation of a 13-acre open space system; preservation of historical buildings, such as the Bulfinch Courthouse and the Davenport Building; development of a vital mixed use district with retail, office and housing uses; and initiation of the East Cambridge Stabilization Committee on which residents work together to upgrade the neighborhood and prevent displacement of low-income residents with the aid of a \$250,000 annual city fund.

But the success of this ten-year revitalization effort, as well as rapid economic growth throughout the city and the region, raises new questions: Who has recently moved to East Cambridge and what affect will this have on existing residents? How can we ensure that future development is compatible with the residential neighborhood? How can we retain and expand the supply of affordable housing for low-income residents? How can we minimize future traffic and parking problems? How can we assist small businesses so they can stay in the neighborhood? The East Cambridge Neighborhood Study is the first step in forming a neighborhood consensus around these issues and in advancing workable solutions to them.

Purpose of the Study

In response to growing public concern over the degree of change occurring in East Cambridge, a neighborhood committee and the Community Development Department worked together to study the most pressing concerns in East Cambridge.

The purposes of the East Cambridge Neighborhood Study are to:

- (1) Examine the current demographics of East Cambridge — such as: population, income, education and employment — and how they have changed over time.
- (2) Assess the physical changes that have occurred in East Cambridge and identify priority land use and zoning concerns.
- (3) Formulate an action plan which will serve as a general guide and a joint city and neighborhood workplan for future growth and improvements.

To accomplish this, staff from the Community Development Department worked with a newly formed East Cambridge Neighborhood Study Committee, an 11-member group including representatives from the East Cambridge Planning Team, Stabilization Committee, business community, neighborhood council, clergy and other concerned residents. The committee met from March to June 1988 to discuss key neighborhood issues: population changes, land use and zoning, Cambridge Street business district, traffic and parking, housing, and parks and open space.

During these meetings, the committee reviewed new information, discussed the results of a recent demographic and community opinion survey, invited in guests who had a particular expertise, and strived for consensus around neighborhood concerns and recommendations for each topic.

Methodology

The Community Development Department and the East Cambridge Neighborhood Study Committee used an array of research methods in compiling information for this report. This information has been the basis for the recommendations that conclude each topic area. The most significant include:

(1) Analysis of U.S. Census data from 1960 to 1980.

(2) A comprehensive land use inventory and in-depth analysis of over 100 non-residential sites.

(3) Analysis of the zoning in East Cambridge, including allowable potential development in each zoning area.

(4) Extensive research on housing characteristics and sales trends from 1960 to 1986.

(5) A 1988 demographic and community opinion survey. From March 19-30, 1988, Bell Associates conducted a random telephone survey of 362 East Cambridge residents. The survey results, presented throughout the report, are estimated to be accurate within plus or minus five percent.

(6) A 1988 mail survey of participants of the East Cambridge Stabilization Committee and Planning Team to gauge opinion on quality of life, community spirit and specific topics addressed in this report. Questionnaires were mailed to 65 people and 35 responded. Results of this survey are also presented throughout this report.

Community Participation Process and Outreach Methods

Neighborhood groups and the Community Development Department have worked together to create an open and inclusionary process for the neighborhood study. The study has undergone extensive community discussion and review, including:

(1) Formation of a diverse Neighborhood Study Committee comprised of representatives from the Planning Team, Stabilization Committee, business community, neighborhood council, clergy and other concerned residents. Residents volunteered for the committee at a widely publicized Planning Team meeting in February 1988. With the approval of meeting participants, other representatives were asked to participate on the study committee to achieve even broader representation.

(2) The Neighborhood Study Committee held twelve meetings on selected topic areas from March to June 1988. Representatives from city agencies (Traffic Department, Revaluation, Community Development), Just-A-Start, Cambridge Street Business Association, Planning Team, Stabilization Committee and other groups served as resource people for the committee.

(3) The Committee and Community Development Department staff provided periodic updates to members of the Planning Team and Stabilization Committee throughout the study process.

(4) The draft summary of the Committee's report appeared in the East Cambridge News prior to the neighborhood-wide public meetings. The East Cambridge News is distributed door-to-door to every East Cambridge household.

(5) Neighborhood-wide meetings, attended by approximately 100 people at each session, were held to provide an opportunity for residents to comment and suggest changes on the Committee's draft report. The Study Committee incorporated several substantive changes to this report as a result of these meetings.

Study Area

Located in the northeastern section of the city, East Cambridge is defined by its residents distinctly as the area "east of the railroad tracks" to the riverfront. Its bordering neighborhoods are

Wellington-Harrington, Kendall Square, and Area 4. (See map on the following page). East Cambridge is referred to on the city's maps as Neighborhood 1.

The 375-acre area is bounded by the Riverfront to the east, McGrath Highway to the north, the railroad tracks to the west and Broadway to the south. (See map on page 17). The study of Cambridge Street, includes a nine block area from First Street to the railroad tracks.

This report does not include data collection or analysis of North Point, the 75-acre area north of McGrath Highway. The Community Development Department is now completing a comprehensive rezoning and urban design plan for North Point.

Highlights of the Study Committee Concerns

(1) Without adequate controls, committee members fear East Cambridge will become overdeveloped in the near future, placing additional strains on city services, traffic, parking, and the overall quality of life. In particular, there is concern about the amount of potential development allowed in the industrial area and the Commonwealth Energy parking lot in the southern periphery of the residential neighborhood.

(2) East Cambridge residents are often not informed of proposed development projects early enough — especially those being built as-of-right — and, therefore, do not have an opportunity to communicate their comments and opinions to city officials and developers.

(3) The Committee is concerned about the potential change in the mix of residential and commercial uses on Cambridge Street and strongly believes in maintaining the diversity and character of Cambridge Street as a neighborhood commercial district.

(4) There is widespread agreement that many of the buildings and public areas on Cambridge

Street are in need of renovation and that upgrading the business district will require strong cooperation and commitment among the businesses, residents and the City.

(5) Automobile and truck traffic — particularly on Gore Street, Cambridge Street and Third Street — as well as general traffic cutting through residential streets, pose a major problem for residents.

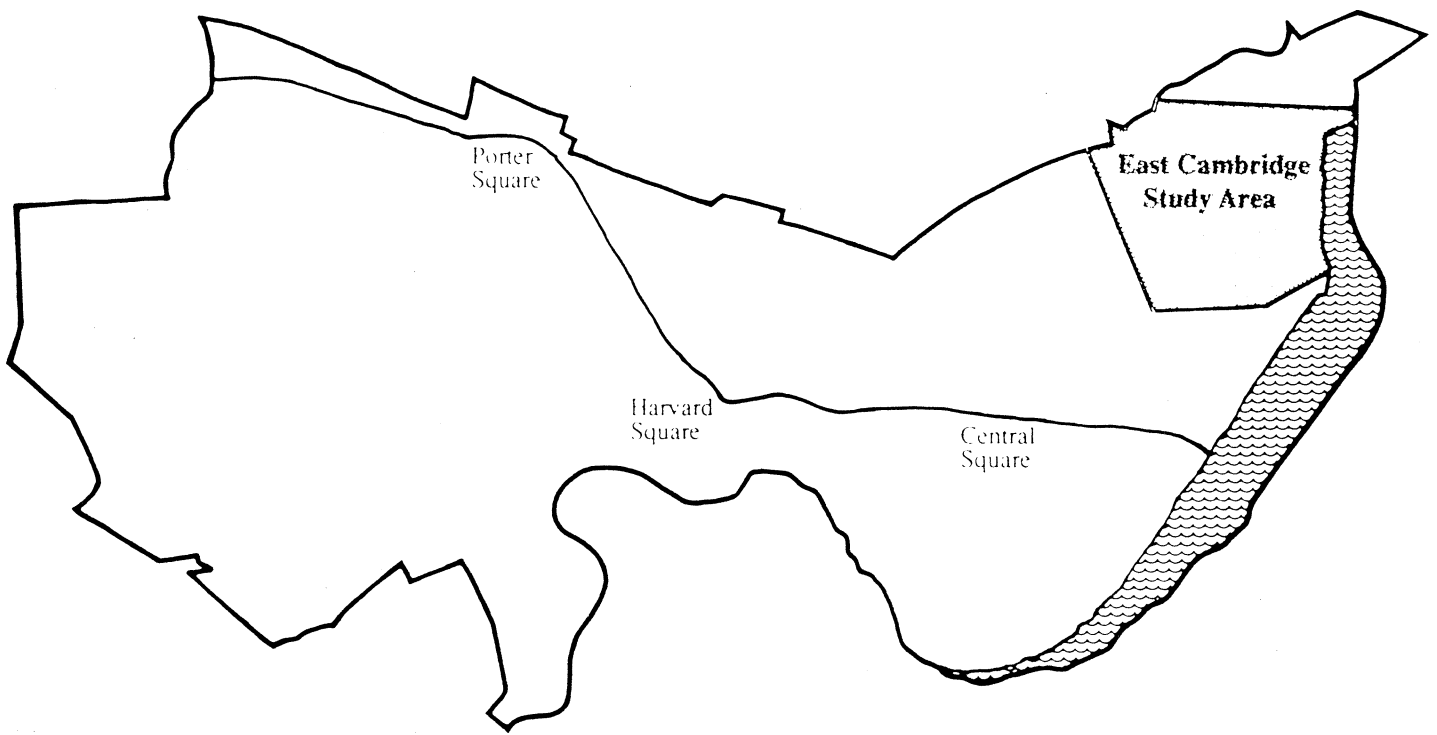
(6) The shortage of resident parking both in the residential district and on Cambridge Street is one of the Committee's top concerns. In addition, the misuse of visitor permits and illegally parked cars are a continual problem for residents, especially near the Courthouse and the Lechmere T-Station.

(7) Escalating housing prices are making it extremely difficult for long-time residents, especially low and moderate income residents, to remain in the neighborhood. The Committee believes there is a strong need for expanded ownership and rental housing opportunities in East Cambridge.

(8) The conversion of three-family homes into condominiums may accelerate over the next decade. The Committee believes further study is required to determine whether these conversions will reduce the number of affordable rental units or whether there is an opportunity to create affordable homeownership opportunities through such conversions.

(9) Committee members believe that rent control tends to be a disincentive for property owners to improve their buildings and that small property owners are not adequately informed about the rules and procedures of rent control.

(10) The Committee believes there is a lack of coordination in park planning and maintenance. As a result, park maintenance is not given enough priority and the City fails to take a comprehensive, preventative approach to managing the park system.



EAST CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY
NEIGHBORHOOD LOCATION MAP

City of Cambridge

Cambridge Community Development Department
January, 1988



EAST CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY

STUDY AREA

City of Cambridge

Cambridge Community Development Department

January, 1988

Highlights of the Recommendations

A principal feature of the Neighborhood Study is the series of recommendations in each topic area. The East Cambridge Neighborhood Study Committee and the Cambridge Community Development Department jointly support each of the 39 recommendations in this report. Some of the most significant recommendations are presented below:

(1) Undertake a rezoning study of most of the non-residential districts to further control larger-scale development and, where appropriate, promote mixed use projects that include a strong component of affordable housing. These areas include: First to Second Street; a large portion of the industrial area between Charles Street and Binney Street from Third Street to Fulkerson Street; and the Commonwealth Energy site south of Binney Street. As part of this process, the Community Development Department should work with a committee of residents and property owners to prepare a permanent rezoning petition for the above priority areas. (See page 47).

(2) Promote a strong visual and pedestrian connection from the development areas on the periphery of the neighborhood to the East Cambridge residential district. These development areas should be seen as an integral part of the East Cambridge residential neighborhood. (See page 48).

(3) Establish a procedure by which the Inspectional Services Department and the Community Development Department notify abutters and relevant neighborhood groups in East Cambridge of proposed development projects filed with the city. (See page 48).

(4) Start a Cambridge Street business assistance program, such as the National Main Street Program, which would physically upgrade the business district and provide a broad range of services and assistance to small business owners on Cambridge Street. (See page 54).

(5) Undertake a study of the parking problems on Cambridge Street, which includes exploring options for providing more parking for residents who live on Cambridge Street. (See page 54).

(6) Work with a neighborhood committee to implement a one-way street system in East Cambridge to reduce traffic on residential streets. (See page 60).

(7) Establish strict traffic mitigation measures for all new development projects in East Cambridge, which would require developers to take significant steps to minimize traffic impacts in the neighborhood. (See page 60).

(8) Form a neighborhood committee to work with the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority and the Community Development Department on building low and moderate income housing on the Department of Transportation lands, pending the transfer of this land from the federal government. (See page 68).

(9) Study the conversion of three-family homes to condominiums to determine its effect on the supply of affordable housing and to determine if such conversions can be a potential resource for creating new affordable homeownership opportunities, including forms of limited equity ownership. (See page 68).

(10) Start a pilot program to involve residents in the maintenance and beautification of neighborhood parks. (See page 75).

Organization of the Report

The report begins with an overview of the demographic characteristics of East Cambridge. Next, it highlights resident opinions of key neighborhood concerns. In general, each subsequent section (land use and zoning, Cambridge Street, traffic and parking, housing and parks and open space) is organized in the following way:

(1) Presentation of the research results.

(2) Highlights of the 1988 neighborhood surveys, including a community opinion survey conducted by Bell Associates, and a survey of participants of the East Cambridge Stabilization Committee and Planning Team conducted by the Community Development Department.

(3) Outline of the Study Committee's key concerns.

(4) Joint recommendations of the East Cambridge Neighborhood Study Committee and the Community Development Department.